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The central life interests (CLI) of male industrial workers is shown to be related to their self-described personality characteristics. Workers who have a CLI in work have personality characteristics that accord with general expectations about what kinds of people may best fit the requirements of an industrial setting. Workers who have a CLI in nonwork settings have personality characteristics that may be described as non-fitting with an industrial environment. Individuals with no preference in CLI are viewed as searching for an anchor for their interests with the potential of finding it in the work institution. The implications of these findings are discussed. (Author)

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WORKERS' CENTRAL LIFE INTERESTS AND PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS

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WORKERS' CENTRAL LIFE INTERESTS AND PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS

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It seems reasonable to suppose that orientations toward the social world in which people live will have some relationship to their personality characteristics. This certainly is the burden of theory and evidence from the psychiatric literature. The purpose of this paper is to test whether it is possible to demonstrate that a measure of orientation toward work, on the one hand, and a measure of personality of workers, on the other hand, bear some relationship to each other.

Theory

The concept of Central Life Interests (CLI) has been set forth elsewhere (Dubin, 1956). The basic notion is that individuals focus their major interests in a limited few, or even a single institutional setting which becomes central for organizing their most preferred activities. In institutions that are not central to individual, he is able to perform effectively through a largely instrumental orientation toward them. The affective self investment of the individual is made in the institutional setting that is his Central Life Interest (Faunce & Dubin, 1973). It then becomes important to determine whether the personality characteristics of the individual are associated with the selection of a CLI. For example, does a high Need for Achievement in the individual become associated with his choice of an organized group setting as a central life interest if he lives in a complex industrial society where the recognition for and reward of achievement is principally within organizations (Birney, 1968 reviews research and theory on n Ach)? Does a high Need for Affiliation in the individual become

associated with his choice of his family or friendship group as his CLI (Radloff, 1968 summarizes some of this field)?

Much of the research and theory dealing with the relation between personality and social setting in work organizations focused on managers and executives with a concern for determining whether successful and unsuccessful executives could be distinguished from each other according to their personality characteristics (Henry, 1949 is a very perceptive early analysis and Harrell & Harrell, 1973 is a recent example of continuing research). These and comparable researches do not directly link personality with CLI, although by suggesting that there is a "fit" between personality types and social settings, the direction of that research points to the problem of this paper.

This paper focuses on industrial workers among whom it is alleged that the "blue- ollar blues" are rampant (Work in America, 1973). This widely discussed phenomenon may be linked to the fact that there is a poor fit between personality and work environment. Or it may be that people with different personality profiles are related in distinctive ways to their social environments, and that those persons who do not consider work important to them have personality characteristics that "fit" some other social setting than work. Among such non-work oriented persons the work environment may be instrumental for their significant lives away from work, and rather than being "blue" they are simply indifferent to the work environment. This intriguing possibility depends on whether there is some relationship between personality and CLI, and this study provides some positive clues in that direction.

Method

Sample

Central Life Interests and personality characteristics were measured in

a study of work attitudes conducted in 1971 among employees of one division of a telephone company located in a western state. The sample consisted of females who held non-supervisory clerical jobs and males who held a variety of blue-collar jobs concerned with the installation and maintenance of telephone equipment.

Subjects were informed through company channels of the general nature of the study and encouraged to participate. It was made clear to them that their participation was voluntary. All subjects were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

Approximately 1,000 people were available for participation in the study. Of these, 605 (61%) completed the questionnaires. The major reason for the relatively low participation rate was the intense work load at several of the company's locations which prevented many people from being released from work. All data were obtained in small group sessions on company premises during regular working hours.

Research Instruments

Central Life Interest. An individual's central life interest was assessed with the Central Life Interest (CLI) questionnaire developed by Dubin (1956). The CLI questionnaire measures a person's central life interest by describing a behavior and asking for the setting in which it is preferred to enact the behavior. A respondent is presented with a specific behavior and three alternative settings for the occurrence of the behavior. One alternative specifies the work setting, another specifies some setting away from work, and the third indicates no preference as to the setting of the behavior. Thus, each of the alternatives to an item is considered to be a job, non-job, or no preference response (i.e., no locale preference).

The questionnaire contained 32 items convering behaviors dealing with membership in formal organizations, technological aspects of the environment, informal personal relations, and general everyday experiences. The job, non-job, and no preference alternatives to each of the items were randomly ordered throughout the questionnaire.

In earlier work with the CLI, an individual's responses were examined to determine whether or not he could be scored job-oriented. If an individual could not be scored job-oriented, he was assigned to the non-job-oriented category. The scoring procedure was altered in a recent study (Dubin & Champoux, 1973) to allow an individual to be explicitly scored job-oriented or non-job-oriented. Anyone who could not be clearly placed in one of these categories was considered to have no clear preference for either of these two sectors as a central life interest. The "no preference" central life interest is a very active orientation in which the individual chooses either job-oriented or non-job-oriented responses without a strong preference across all items for either orientation. The no preference category is not to be interpreted as an "alienated" response. This modified scoring procedure was also used in the present study.

A subject was scored job-oriented if he chose at least one-half or 16 job-oriented responses to the 32 items in the questionnaire. Alternatively, a subject was scored job-oriented if a total of seventy percent or 22 job-oriented and no preference alternatives were chosen with a minimum of forty percent or 13 of his total responses being job-oriented.

Comparable criteria were used to score an individual non-job-oriented. A subject was considered to be non-job-oriented if he chose at least one-half or 16 non-job-oriented responses. Alternatively, a subject was scored non-

job-oriented if a total of seventy percent or 22 non-job-oriented and no preference alternatives were chosen with a minimum of forty percent or 13 of his total responses being non-job-oriented.

If a subject could not be scored job-oriented or non-job-oriented, he was scored as having no preference in his central life interests.

Personality Characteristics. Ghiselli's (1971) Self-Description Inventory (SDI) was used to measure personality characteristics. This instrument presents a subject with 64 pairs of adjectives. For one-half of these pairs the subject chooses the one adjective in each pair that he believes is most descriptive of himself. For the remaining half of the pairs, the subject chooses the adjective in each pair he believes is least descriptive of himself. The thirteen personality scales measured by the instrument were scored according to the procedure described by Ghiselli. Of the 13 scales, only 11 were considered to be of relevance to this study (the Intelligence and the Maturity scales were not utilized).

Data Analysis

Only individuals with complete responses on both the CLI and SDI were used in the analysis. Complete responses were obtained from 427 Blue-Collar Males and 141 Clerical Females.

Each of the SDI scales differ in the possible range of scores. To facilitate interpretation of the means of the scales, each individual's score was standardized before using it in the analysis. The standard scores were computed for the two samples.

A multiple discriminant analysis, using the procedure described by Overall and Klett (1972, Ch. 10), was performed to determine whether the three CLI groups could be distinguished from each other in terms of personality characteristics.

Results

Since there were three CLI groups, two discriminant functions were computed for each sample. Only the first discriminant function for the Blue-Collar Males was statistically significant ($p<.001$).

The coefficients for the significant discriminant function for the Blue-Collar Males are shown in Table 1. The coefficients for the first discri-

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Insert Table 1 About Here

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minant function for the Clerical Females are also shown in the table. The SDI scales are rank ordered separately for each sample based on the absolute value of the coefficients. Though the discriminant function for the Clerical Females was not statistically significant, it is apparent that the SDI scales that are contributing the most to the CLI group differences are distinctive, and unlike those in the sample of males. Whether this is indicative of a true sex difference in personality characteristics of those with different CLI orientations is, based on these data, only speculative.

The first four personality characteristics listed for the Blue-Collar Males appear to be the most important in differentiating among the three CLI groups. These four are Decisiveness, Need for Self-Actualization, Need for Job Security, and Need for Occupational Achievement. Initiative and Supervisory Ability also appear to be contributing to differentiating among the groups but to a lesser extent. The remaining five characteristics contribute virtually nothing to differentiating individuals with different CLI orientations.

The mean standardized scores of the three CLI groups for each SDI scale are shown in Table 2 for the two samples. The scales are in the same order

as in Table 1.

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Insert Table 2 About Here

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Individuals with specific CLI orientations appear to possess a set of personality characteristics that is highly consistent with their orientation. The job-oriented males are distinguished from the other two CLI groups by having much higher scores on the Decisiveness, Initiative, and Supervisory Ability scales, and a very low score on the Need for Job Security scale. Job-oriented people evidently see themselves as decisive or able to make quick decisions, taking the initiative, and possess greater ability to direct the work of others than is true of the self evaluation by individuals with other CLI orientations. Individuals who possess these personality characteristics are more likely to find opportunities to express them at work than away from work.

The non-job-oriented males scored lowest of the three groups on the Decisiveness, Need for Occupational Achievement, Initiative, and Need for Self-Actualization scales and highest on the Need for Job Security scale. The first three of these five personality characteristics would be best expressed in the work setting. The low scores of the non-job CLI workers on these scales accords with their central life interests being focused away from work. Their instrumental view of work is revealed in the importance of job security to them.

Male workers with no preference in CLI display a pattern of personality characteristics such that they are unique in some and more similar to one of the other CLI groups on others. They have the highest Need for Self-

Actualization and Need for Occupational Achievement, and they have the lowest score on Supervisory Ability of the three groups. They are almost identical to the job-oriented group in their low Need for Job Security, and almost identical to the non-job-oriented in their low score on the Initiative scale. On the remaining important scale, Decisiveness, they score midway between the other two CLI groups.

We have already established through the discriminant analysis that the female clerical workers in the three CLI groups cannot be distinguished from each other at a statistically significant level in terms of their personality characteristics. It is, therefore, only suggestive of possible personality differences to examine the results of comparing the mean scores for each CLI group on the personality scales, as displayed in Table 2. The non-job-oriented women are low in their scores on their Need for Job Security, Need for Power Over Others, and Self Assurance, relative to the job-oriented women. However, the non-job-oriented females are high in their Need for Financial Reward whereas their job-oriented peers score low on this need. The women with no preference in CLI score between the other two groups on each of the five most important scales except Need for Job Security on which they are like the job-oriented.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to find out whether there is some meaningful fit between personality and the source of Central Life Interests of workers. For male blue-collar workers there are some remarkably interesting relationships. We will discuss the job-oriented, the non-job-oriented, and those with no preference in CLI in that order.

This group of job-oriented workers rate their own personality characteristics as though they were personnel specialists writing ideal personality profiles for "good" workers. Workers with a job-oriented CLI express their self image as possessing the personal requisites for getting ahead in the world of work. They rate themselves highest of the three groups on Decisiveness, Initiative, and Supervisory Ability, clearly highly valued personality characteristics in the idealization of American industrial character. This self image is buttressed by their low evaluation of their own need for job security, perhaps because they feel they are good enough that job security can be taken for granted. It is also notable that they do not see themselves as having a great need for Self-Actualization (compared with the other two groups) which could certainly make sense for a group of people who are job-oriented and who may already be self-actualizing in this, their preferred institutional environment.

The workers in the sample who possessed a non-job CLI rated their own personalities very much in accord with this orientation. They evaluated themselves lowest of the three groups on Decisiveness, Need for Occupational Achievement, and Initiative and highest in their Need for Job Security. They clearly are not the strivers in the industrial setting and look to it largely to satisfy their need for a secure job. The non-job oriented workers have an even lower Need for Self-Actualization that do job-oriented workers, which may indicate that they, too, are already self-actualizing, but not in the work institution.

It will be recalled that the individuals who have no preference in CLI are searching for an anchor for their central life interests, sometimes preferring a work setting for activities, sometimes a non-work setting, with

neither arena dominating the preferences. In the very process of seeking an anchor for the central life interests they may not yet feel self-actualized, and indeed, this group rates itself highest of the three on Need for Self-Actualization. They also rate themselves the highest in Need for Occupational Achievement, which perhaps, indicates that they have a lively interest in the work setting, and a need for this environment to be more rewarding. The "in between" position of this group is revealed by the fact that on the other three important dimensions of personality they are more like the job-oriented on one, more like the non-job oriented on another, and midway between the two groups on a third.

These results are suggestive of the fact that the central life interests of persons and their personality characteristics are related. This relationship is specific to the requirements of performance in the institutional setting which is preferred. We found a good fit between personality and the work institution among those who had a CLI in work. We found an understandable and appropriate non-fit between personality and the work institution among those who had a CLI in some non-work institutional setting. We also found that those who had not yet established an anchor for their CLI had personality characteristics and needs that could very well be compatible with the work setting, if more rewards and self-actualizing opportunities were available in it.

Perhaps a general conclusion is that personality characteristics may be institutional-specific. This is a lead in a new direction that complements the long-time concern with studying personality in relation to occupations and professions.

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Footnotes

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TABLE 1

Discriminant Function Coefficients for

Self-Description Inventory Scales

Blue-Collar Males		Clerical Females	
Self-Description Inventory Scale	Coefficients	Self-Description Inventory Scale	Coefficients
Decisiveness	1.00	Need for Job Security	.74
Need for Self-Actualization	-.60	Need for Power Over Others	.60
Need for Job Security	-.52	Need for High Financial Reward	-.55
Need for Occupational Achievement	-.41	Self-Assurance	.45
Initiative	.26	Masculinity-Femininity	-.19
Supervisory Ability	-.22	Initiative	.18
Working Class Affinity	.10	Decisiveness	-.14
Need for Power Over Others	-.10	Need for Self-Actualization	.04
Self-Assurance	.10	Need for Occupational Achievement	-.01
Need for High Financial Reward	.00	Supervisory Ability	-.01
Masculinity-Femininity	.00	Working Class Affinity	.01
Total Discriminatory Power[1]	7%	Total Discriminatory Power	3%
Total Discriminable Variance[2]	50.92	Total Discriminable Variance	8.66
d.f.	22	d.f.	22
	p<.001		n.s.
N	427	N	141

[1]Total discriminatory power was measured by the Omega Squared statistic described by Tatsuoka (1970).

[2]The total discriminable variance computed by the procedure in Overall and Klett (1972, Ch. 10) is approximately distributed as a chi-square variate with degrees of freedom as noted.

TABLE 2

Standard Score Means for Each Self-Description Inventory Scale by Central Life Interest Group

Blue-Collar Males				Clerical Females			
Self-Description Inventory Scale	NJ*	NP	JO	Self-Description Inventory Scale	NJ	NP	JO
Decisiveness	-.31	-.02	.47	Need for Job Security	-.15	.03	.03
Need for Self-Actualization	-.10	.04	-.05	Need for Power Over Others	-.20	.03	.17
Need for Job Security	.25	-.06	-.07	Need for High Financial Reward	.16	.00	-.31
Need for Occupational Achievement	-.13	.04	-.02	Self-Assurance	-.12	.00	.25
Initiative	-.07	-.02	.19	Masculinity-Femininity	-.01	-.01	.07
Supervisory Ability	.06	-.05	.14	Initiative	-.07	-.01	.22
Working Class Affinity	-.03	-.01	.09	Decisiveness	-.03	.02	-.06
Need for Power Over Others	-.07	.04	-.07	Need for Self-Actualization	.11	-.04	.10
Self-Assurance	-.15	.04	.02	Need for Occupational Achievement	.02	-.02	.13
Need for High Financial Reward	.03	.02	-.13	Supervisory Ability	.07	-.03	.09
Masculinity-Femininity	-.10	.05	-.09	Working Class Affinity	-.12	.04	-.05
N	80	281	66	N	26	101	14

*NJ = Non-job-oriented; NP = No Preference; JO = Job-oriented.

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